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ABSTRACT

Characteristics and attitudes of 96 incoming foreign undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), were surveyed in the fall of 1982. Based on questionnaire responses, information was obtained on students' backgrounds, perceptions, goals, needs, and lifestyle. The data showed that a majority of the students were from South or East Asia, and that male students slightly outnumbered female students. Overall, the incoming foreign students had fairly strong academic backgrounds and anticipated a positive experience at the university. They ranked UMCP highly, most frequently citing a good academic reputation as the primary reason for choosing to attend UMCP. Investigative occupations were indicated by the majority of students as present occupational goals. Career preparation, exploration of job opportunities related to major, and improvement of writing and speaking skills were reported as greatest needs, while adjusting to social life of college was viewed as the easiest aspect of coming to UMCP. More than half of the incoming undergraduate foreign students indicated an interest in educational-vocational counseling, while slightly less than half stated a definite interest in emotional-social counseling. (Author/SW)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Jeanne E. Manese, Frederick T.L. Leong, and William E. Sedlacek

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This study was done in collaboration with the Office of International Education Services, Valerie Woolston, Director.

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SUMMARY

Incoming undergraduate international students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), completed a questionnaire on their background, perceptions, goals, needs, and lifestyle. The data showed that a majority of the incoming students were from South or East Asia, and that male students slightly outnumbered female students. Overall, the incoming international undergraduates had fairly strong academic backgrounds and anticipated a positive experience at the University. They ranked the University of Maryland, College Park, highly, most frequently citing a good academic reputation as the primary reason for choosing to attend UMCP. Investigative occupations were indicated by the majority of students as present occupational goals. Career preparation, exploration of job opportunities related to major, and improvement of writing and speaking skills were reported as greatest needs, while adjusting to social life of college was viewed as the easiest aspect of coming to UMCP. More than half of the incoming undergraduate international students indicated an interest in educational - vocational counseling, while slightly less than half of the sample stated a definite interest in emotional - social counseling. Implications of these findings for student personnel professionals are discussed, and areas for future research are suggested.

According to the annual census by the Institute of International Education (IIE), more than 300,000 foreigners with student visas were enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions in the academic year 1980-1981. Records indicated that since World War II, the number of international students approximately doubled each decade, and one projection by IIE estimated there may be more than one million international students in the United States by the end of the century (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983).

However, in investigating international students, two trends have been pointed out (Wray, 1981). First, broad generalizations or conclusions were difficult to make, since international students in the U.S. originate from more than 150 nations, attend over 2500 schools, and differ on a multitude of individual variables, including language proficiency, financial status, and educational preparation. Second, despite the long history of international students on American campuses, until recently little interest was shown in these students by much of the higher education community.

Taking into account the wide diversity among international students, Lee (1981), in a comprehensive study, surveyed nearly 2000 students from developing nations about their most important needs and satisfaction of these needs. Overall, general findings indicated the most important needs listed by the international students were financial needs, educational attainment, and professional expertise (e.g., practical experience, specialized skills). Needs reported by the international students as least satisfied included practical experience, post education and return facilitation, and financial needs; while information needs and achievement or primary educational goals were selected as needs most highly satisfied. However, Lee's findings indicated that need importance and need satisfaction varied by regional origin, major field or study, sponsorship category (government or nongovernment financed), academic level (undergraduate versus graduate) and employment status (whether or not students had a job waiting in their

home country). Therefore, in addition to the more generalized findings, the study highlighted the importance of investigating subgroups within the diverse international student population.

While research interest in international students has emerged quite recently in many academic institutions, at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), the Counseling Center conducted two studies on international students in the late 1960's. O'Donnell and Maxwell (1967), in a study to identify the characteristics of international students at UMCP, found approximately 75% of the students were male, 50% were undergraduates, more undergraduates were from Iran than any other country, and about 40% of the undergraduates were enrolled in the College of Engineering. Chapman and Sedlacek (1969) compared immigrant and non-immigrant students with American students at UMCP on academic performance. Findings indicated no performance differences between immigrant and non-immigrant students, but poorer academic performance by the international students in comparison to the American students. In 1981, the Counseling Center and the Office of International Education Services at UMCP began a cooperative research program. Leong and Sedlacek (1982) surveyed all incoming international students about their general background, views of the University, vocational and academic plans and other topics. They found students to have generally strong academic skills and high educational aspirations. Findings also indicated international students were most concerned about meeting financial expenses and budgeting time, and were least concerned about selecting a field of study and/or career and getting to know other students.

The purpose of this study was to provide data on incoming undergraduate international students. In particular, general background demographics, needs, views, and concerns of the students were examined. The study marks the continuation of the cooperative research program between the Counseling Center and the office of International Education Services at the University of Maryland,

College Park.

Method

All undergraduate international students (N=96: 52% male; 48% female) attending a required orientation in the Fall of 1982 completed a questionnaire on background, perceptions, goals, needs, attitudes and lifestyles. A majority of the students (54%) were from South or East Asia. Other places of origin reported by students were the Middle East (20%), Europe (10%), Latin America (5%), Africa (4%), and "other" (6%). Fifty-eight percent of the international students were non-immigrants, while 42% were immigrants.

Results

What kind of economic and educational backgrounds do international students have?

Estimated annual family income ranged from less than $5,000 (6%) to over $50,000 (12%). Sixty-one percent of the students said that they came from homes where the mother worked while they were growing up, while 27% indicated that their mothers did not work outside the home. Only 21% of the sample indicated that they were expected to earn their own tuition money. Median personal earnings, for the previous year were approximately $150.00.

For over half the group (58%), the University of Maryland was not the first school attended in the United States, and 69% of the students stated they had been in the United States for two or more years. In general, the incoming international students had good academic records, with 32% indicating that they had ranked in the top 10% of their secondary school graduating class, 36% in the top one-fourth of the graduating class, 30% in the upper half of their class, and only 3% in the lower half of their class. A majority of the sample (71%) had "B" averages while in secondary school, while 14% had "A" averages, and an approximately equal percentage (15%) had "C" averages as secondary students.

Students reported a median of approximately 18.5 hours per week of study

time in secondary school, although there was great variability among the students sampled.

How do international students rate the University?

Overall, the incoming international undergraduates had quite a positive view of UMCP. Seventy-two percent of the sample reported UMCP was their first choice, while 15% selected it as their second choice of schools. Over one-fourth (28%) decided to attend UMCP based primarily on the University's good academic reputation, while another 28% stated that recommendations from either family, faculty, or friends was their main reason for attendance. Geographical location of the campus also was cited frequently (22%) by the students as their principal reason for coming to UMCP.

What are their views of the university experience?

When asked to indicate their basic philosophy about higher education, 37% answered that they perceived college as primarily a place to prepare for a career, while another 37% indicated that a philosophy of higher education that attaches greatest importance to interest in ideas, pursuit of knowledge, and cultivation of the intellect was most descriptive of their view. Only 13% saw higher education as primarily a vehicle for social interaction, and 13% selected development of personal identity and individual interests as the major role of higher education.

When questioned about their expectations of the easiest aspect of adjusting to college, getting to meet and know people was selected most frequently (37%) by the students, 15% chose studying efficiently, 14% chose selecting a field of study, and 14% reported earning satisfactory grades as their perception of what would be the easiest adjustment to make in college. Meeting financial expenses (18%) and earning satisfactory grades (18%) were most frequently expected to be the hardest aspect of adjusting to college. A number of international undergraduates also viewed budgeting time wisely (15%), selecting a career (15%), and becoming a more critical thinker (12%) as potentially difficult adjustments.

Though many of the international students (41%) felt absolutely certain they would obtain a college degree, an even larger percentage (51%) indicated certainty about their choice of major. Most of the international undergraduates (73%) expected their courses would be generally stimulating and exciting, and anticipated many opportunities and facilities for creative activities on campus. However, 45% indicated they believed college work would be harder than what they were expecting. About half of the sample (48%) felt most instructors care about students. When asked to select the one characteristic they liked most in a teacher, 32% chose a good style of delivery, 18% selected well organized classes, 17% chose knows the material well, and 14% a teacher's good sense of humor.

What are the career interests and decisions of international undergraduates?

An overwhelming majority (69%) of the international students indicated Investigative occupations (as coded by Holland, 1973) as their present first choice occupational goal. Other reported percentages for occupational goals were: Social (8%), Conventional (8%), Artistic (7%), Enterprising (4%), Realistic (3%), and unclassified occupations (1%). When asked to select the one most important factor in their career choice, intrinsic interest in the field (14%) and working with people (14%) were chosen more frequently. High earnings (13%), status (12%) and independence (12%) were also selected as relatively important. Working with things (3%) was of least importance to international students, and job availability (6%) and working with ideas (7%) also ranked low as factors important to career choice. Eighteen percent of the undergraduates indicated that they had not made a career decision.

What are the career development needs of international students?

A majority of the international students sampled reported moderate to strong needs in all assessed areas of career development. The data indicated that international students felt they particularly needed to learn how to prepare for careers of interest and explore job opportunities, while choosing or changing

a major rated low as a career development need. Needs assessed, with group means and standard deviations for each item are presented below.

Item	Mean*	SD
1. To explore job opportunities for people with my major.	3.38	.80
2. To learn how to prepare for careers in which I am interested.	3.37	.75
3. To talk to a counselor about my career plans.	3.21	.78
4. To learn how occupations can affect my future way of life.	3.17	.82
5. To explore my interests, values, and abilities as they relate to my educational/career alternatives.	3.16	.88
6. To develop effective job seeking skills.	3.09	.82
7. To obtain work experience in career areas in which I am interested.	3.08	.91
8. To obtain information about a variety of career areas.	2.98	.86
9. To receive help in choosing or changing a major.	2.73	1.10

*1=no need, 2=weak need, 3=moderate need, 4=strong need

What are the academic concerns of international students?

Overall, the data showed that writing skills and speaking skills were areas in which a large proportion of international students wished to improve, while they were least concerned with improving math skills. Items, means, and standard deviations are as follows:

Item	Mean*	SD
1. To receive help in selecting/scheduling classes.	3.24	.72
2. To develop more effective study skills.	3.23	.81
3. To improve my writing skills.	3.20	.88
4. To become more comfortable in speaking up in class.	3.05	.93
5. To obtain more help from my academic advisor.	3.03	.83
6. To receive help in establishing my academic program plan.	2.99	.86
7. To get information about the majors offered at UMCP.	2.98	.87
8. To improve my reading skills.	2.93	.99
9. To take better notes in class.	2.92	.91
10. To learn more about University/community sources, facilities and events.	2.76	.76
11. To learn how to adjust to different teachers' expectations.	2.74	.92
12. To feel less anxious when taking tests.	2.70	.99
13. To receive help in becoming involved in school activities.	2.69	.79
14. To understand how to use the library better.	2.67	.93
15. To improve my math skills.	2.66	.99
16. To feel less anxious about mathematics.	2.21	1.10

*1=no need, 2=weak need, 3=moderate need, 4=strong need

Who do international students turn to with their concerns, and what resources do they seek?

The data indicated that, in general, international students believe they had an available resource from whom they could get help with their school problems.

Only 8% disagreed with the statement, "If I run into a problem concerning school, I have someone who would listen to me and help me." For 40% of the sample, religion was reported as an additional resource utilized for coping with problems. Overall, a large proportion of international students showed an interest in seeking counseling, with 60% indicating interest in educational-vocational counseling and 40% indicating interest in counseling for emotional-social concerns. International students most frequently cited family (26%), written materials (24%), and friends (23%) as their main sources for information regarding careers.

What self-perceptions and self-expectations do international students hold?

The results of the survey indicated that the sample of international students had a generally confident view of themselves, and believed they would do well academically and vocationally. Specific items included in the questionnaire and the group's mean responses and standard deviations are listed below.

Item	Mean*	SD
1. People can change me pretty easily even though I thought my mind was already made up on the subject.	3.53	1.10
2. I expect to have a hard time adjusting to the social life in college.	3.12	.91
3. I expect to have a harder time than most students at UMCP.	3.05	1.10
4. In the group where I am comfortable, often I am looked to as a leader.	3.00	.91
5. I expect to have a hard time adjusting to the academic work of college.	2.97	.93
6. I get discouraged easily when I try to do something and it doesn't work out.	2.94	1.20
7. Once I start something, I finish it.	2.31	.93

Item	Mean*	SD
8. I am as skilled academically as the average applicant to UMCP.	2.16	.95
9. When I believe strongly in something, I act on it.	2.00	.95
10. I expect to maintain a "B" average in my first semester.	2.00	.77
11. I expect to find a job in my chosen field when I graduate.	1.80	.80

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

How do international students utilize their leisure time?

Watching television was a leisure time activity for practically all (95%) of the international undergraduates sampled, with six hours as the approximate median hours of television viewing per week. Engaging in fine arts activities was not as popular with the international students as a group. Thirty percent of the sample had not observed any art exhibitions in the last year, and 23% indicated that they had been to an art exhibition only once in the last year. Similarly, when questioned about their attendance at dramatic productions or musical concerts in the past year, 20% indicated they had not engaged in these activities at all, and 29% cited their frequency of attendance as one time. Also, little interest was shown in following the University's athletic teams as a leisure time activity. Only 18% of the sample reported that they closely follow one or more of the UMCP teams.

What sex role attitudes do international students hold?

Whe asked about their attitudes concerning sex roles, international students' responses suggested neither greatly liberal nor conservative viewpoints. As a

group, the students generally took a neutral position on the questions posed; though agreement with one statement: "There are some professions that are more suitable for men than women", was clearly suggested. Items presented, means, and standard deviations from the survey are listed below.

Item	Mean*	SD
1. High school teachers are more likely to help a male student than a female student.	3.70	.98
2. I would be offended if I saw two men holding hands.	3.11	1.00
3. Women are more serious students than men.	3.06	.95
4. Women earning as much as their dates should bear the expenses equally when they go out together.	2.81	.88
5. There are some professions that are more suitable for men than women.	2.30	.88

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Discussion

Overall, the data showed a majority of the international students were from South or East Asia. Male students outnumbered female students, which appears to be a consistent trend at UMCP and nationally, though both locally and nationwide the proportion of female students has been increasing (Boyer, 1981; Leong & Sedlacek, 1981; O'Donnell & Maxwell, 1967).

The economic background of the students varied somewhat in the group, but generally the international students were not self-supporting. Taking into account the undergraduate status of the sample, as well as the fact that government policies often restrict students with foreign visas from working, this finding is not surprising. Also, more than half of the group indicated they would be

living with their parents or other relatives in the fall semester.

The incoming international undergraduates had fairly strong academic backgrounds, ranked the University highly, and anticipated a positive experience at the University. The University's good academic reputation was cited most frequently by the students as their primary reason for choosing to attend UMCP.

The majority of international students surveyed selected Investigative occupations as their present first choice occupational goal. This finding is consistent with prior research at UMCP (Leong & Sedlacek, 1981, O'Donnell & Maxwell, 1967), and with data gathered nationally, which show engineering as the primary field of study of international students in the U.S. These data implied that Investigative occupations are the predominant interest of international students generally.

The incoming undergraduates in this study reported their greatest needs were career preparation, exploration of job opportunities related to their major, and improvement of writing and speaking skills. Additionally, they indicated that they expected meeting financial expenses and earning satisfactory grades to be the hardest aspects of adjusting to college. Similar findings were obtained by Lee (1981) in her national study. When comparing undergraduate and graduate international students, she found that undergraduates placed significantly higher importance on needs regarding practical experience, academic planning, facilitation of coursework, finances, activities with U.S. nationals and needs regarding university environment. Thus, implications are that undergraduate international students as a group may have some unique concerns separate from graduate international students. As such, student services personnel might consider special programming for international undergraduates around the aforementioned areas.

Though the international undergraduates surveyed stated they had persons to turn to help them get through school, and indicated least concern with

adjusting to the social life in college, it should not be assumed these students neither wanted nor needed University support services. Problems of social adjustment, interpersonal problems, and loneliness and alienation have been found in a number of studies as problems of international students (Klein, Alexander, & Tseng, 1971; Moghrabi, 1972; Owie, 1982). Moreover, almost two thirds of international undergraduates entering UMCP indicated an interest in educational-vocational counseling, and slightly fewer than half of the students reported a definite interest in emotional-social counseling. However, as international students have been reported to be generally reluctant to initiate a counseling relationship (Sue & Sue, 1977), orientation to counseling services and outreach may be particularly important with this group.

Implications overall are that the incoming undergraduate international students at UMCP have high expectations of the University and themselves. They anticipate a responsive environment and feel they have the personal ability to be successful in school and a future career. Whether these expectations are met is not answered in this study. More research, including follow up studies, seems necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the undergraduate international student and for knowledge of these students' university experience.

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